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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TEGUCIGALPA 001932

SIPDIS

CJCS FOR GENERAL MYERS
STATE FOR PM, INL, WHA, WHA/CEN, AND WHA/PPC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/15/2013

TAGS: [OVIP](#) [MARR](#) [MASS](#) [MOPS](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [SNAR](#) [HO](#)

SUBJECT: CJCS GENERAL MYERS MEETS WITH HONDURAN PRESIDENT MADURO TO THANK HIM FOR GOH SUPPORT ON IRAQ AND ART. 98

REF: A. TEGUCIGALPA 1868
 ¶B. TEGUCIGALPA 1904
 ¶C. TEGUCIGALPA 1622
 ¶D. TEGUCIGALPA 1497
 ¶E. TEGUCIGALPA 1173 (ALL NOTAL)

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i., Roger D. Pierce;
Reasons 1.5 (B) and (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: On August 13, CJCS General Myers met with Honduran President Ricardo Maduro and senior government officials to discuss issues of bilateral importance and to thank Honduras for its strong support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, including its troop contribution to that effort, and the signing and ratification of an ICC Article 98 Agreement. Among the particular issues discussed were Iraq, narcotrafficking, terrorism, regional disarmament and integration, the general crime situation in Honduras, and the modernization of the Honduran Armed Forces. The visit was an important boost for both President Maduro and USG-GOH cooperation on political/military issues. END SUMMARY

¶2. (U) CJCS General Myers, accompanied by Mr. Hanley, CPT Hunt, COL Ross, LCDR Cheever, and COL Gonzalez, and from the Embassy Charge, DATT, MILGP Commander, and PolMilOff (notetaker), met August 13 with Honduran President Ricardo Maduro, accompanied by Minister of Defense Federico Breve, Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs Anibal Quinonez, Minister of the Presidency Luis Cosenza, and Honduran CJCS General Barahona. The meeting took place at the Casa Presidencial.

General Myers Expresses Gratitude for Honduran Support

¶3. (C) President Maduro started the meeting off by outlining Honduran actions over the past few months in support of USG foreign policy objectives, specifically mentioning the ratification of an ICC Article 98 Agreement with the U.S. and Honduran troop contributions to Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). Maduro expressed solidarity with the U.S. in the War on Terror, but noted that by overtly supporting the U.S., Honduras was at heightened risk of terrorist attacks. Maduro also acknowledged that his explicit support of the U.S. in Iraq came at a political cost.

¶4. (C) General Myers thanked Maduro for Honduras' support, not only on Iraq and the signing of an ICC Article 98 Agreement with the U.S., but also on Honduras' overall support on the War on Terror and the fight against narcotrafficking. General Myers let Maduro know that the USG has confidence in the preparedness of the Honduran troops en route to Iraq and that the U.S. greatly appreciates Honduras' efforts, stating that the support the Government of Honduras (GOH) has offered the USG has been noticed at the highest levels. General Myers also told Maduro that the predominantly negative press coverage of Iraq was quite different from the facts on the ground. He stated that the Honduran troops would be part of the international effort bringing new hope to the Iraqi people.

The Fight Against Narcotrafficking a Top Priority

¶5. (C) In a very candid manner, Maduro outlined for General Myers the myriad difficulties Honduras faces in effectively fighting the scourge of narcotrafficking, from the lack of necessary resources, to corruption, to a frail legal system, to insufficient coordination amongst the other Latin American countries. Maduro acknowledged that his strong emphasis on crime fighting was the reason for his election and he reiterated that fighting crime, particularly narcotrafficking, remains his number one priority. Maduro stated that if his administration was unable to stem the growing influence of drug-related crime in Honduras, his successor would inherit a terrible situation.

¶6. (C) Regarding narcotrafficking, Maduro told General Myers that he was personally becoming more involved in the fight to reduce corruption and the amount of drugs that illegally transit Honduran territory. While committed to reducing drug

trafficking, Maduro questioned the utility of having a "no shoot-down policy" (ref E), saying that the current policy of escorting intruding aircraft to the border to be handed off to neighboring states was both costly and ineffective.

Maduro pointed to the fact that Honduran airspace was violated on almost a daily basis because the narcotraffickers know that they could transit Honduran airspace without risk. Maduro went so far as to offer his assistance in lobbying the U.S. Congress to change the law that prohibits the USG from sharing tactical air-track information with countries that employ a shoot-down policy.

¶ 17. (C) Maduro also expressed fears over the growing influence of organized crime in Honduras, citing the recent arrest of two Congressmen on drug charges as just the "tip of the iceberg" (refs C and D). Maduro alluded to the influence organized crime can have on elected officials, saying that one plane-load of cocaine could finance a presidential election in Honduras. Maduro also pointed to a linkage between street gangs and narcotrafficking and claimed Honduras was already moving from a transit zone to a staging area for narcotraffickers.

¶ 18. (C) Maduro noted the need for greater information sharing and cooperation between the other Central American states (CENTAMS) and the USG to effectively fight narcotrafficking. He told General Myers that his other CENTAM counterparts share this concern and that movement is afoot to increase the region's ability to better integrate their crime fighting abilities. However, Maduro also noted the lack of resources Honduras faces, specifically mentioning the need for a radar and new helicopters to help in the fight against narcotrafficking.

¶ 19. (C) General Myers thanked Maduro and the GOH for its dedication to fighting narcotrafficking and told Maduro his efforts to foster greater regional integration were the right approach. General Myers further stated that the trans-national threats posed by terrorists and narcotraffickers leave countries little choice but to work closer together. General Myers told Maduro that the USG also needed to re-evaluate its policies toward the area to help the CENTAMS better combat these threats.

Violent Crime a Serious Concern

¶ 10. (C) Maduro confessed the issue of street crime, including violent crime, remains a serious concern despite his best efforts to combat it. While kidnappings and bank robberies have dropped off since Maduro's deployment of the military to assuage police patrols, murder rates have been climbing as well as general gang-related crime. Maduro estimated that over 30,000 Hondurans are gang members with some 20 percent being committed to that type of life-style. Maduro expressed hope that newly passed legislation which makes it a crime to be a gang member would reduce their roles, but he acknowledged that this law alone would not be a panacea to Honduras' crime problems (ref B).

¶ 11. (C) Maduro noted that the judicial system needed to function better and that the police needed to step-up patrols in poorer neighborhoods. He admitted that the general public perception was that the government was not in control of the crime situation, particularly in dealing with gang violence. General Myers indicated he had received a similar message about gangs and violence while visiting El Salvador.

Maduro Stresses the need for Greater Regional Integration

¶ 12. (C) Maduro returned to the need for greater regional integration as one of the keys to strengthening the region's ability to combat terrorism, organized crime, and narcotrafficking. He then mentioned the progress his administration has made on border disputes with both El Salvador and Nicaragua as proof of Honduras' desire to reduce tensions within the region. General Myers applauded these efforts and again stressed that working together with other countries was key to success in the war against terror and drugs.

Regional Disarmament Necessary, but Remains a Prickly Issue

¶ 13. (C) Maduro acknowledged the need for regional disarmament and claimed Honduras stood ready to move forward but that the process was complicated and moving slower than he had originally hoped. He mentioned to General Myers that Honduras had "got the ball rolling," by initiating a meeting with President Flores but that not much progress has happened since then. Maduro reminded General Myers that in terms of manpower Honduras already had the smallest military in the

region.

¶14. (C) Maduro also raised the issue of Honduras' fleet of F-5's and the possible linkage to reductions in Nicaragua's stockpile of Man Portable Air Defense Systems (MANPADS). Maduro indicated he understood why the USG was interested in reducing the number of MANPADS in Nicaragua but he noted that Honduras was ready to discuss the F-5's only in the context of regional disarmament. General Myers told Maduro he understood the situation and that it was not USG policy to pressure Honduras to give up its fleet of F-5's in exchange for a reduction of MANPADS in Nicaragua.

Modernization of the Honduran Armed Forces

¶15. (C) Maduro touched slightly on the on-going modernization of the Honduran Armed Forces (HOAF). Maduro pointed to the fact that the Honduran Military was now a well respected institution with a high degree of esprit de corps. He noted that the armed forces would continue to expand its professionalization and that the HOAF stood ready to embrace new non-traditional missions such as providing disaster relief, combating narcotrafficking, and helping the police reduce street crime.

Boost for Maduro and for USG-GOH Cooperation

¶16. (C) Comment: General Myers' visit was an important boost for President Maduro at a time when he has been buffeted by a number of political problems (ref A). The meeting with Maduro reinforced the Ambassador's statements of appreciation for Maduro's decision to both support Operation Iraqi Freedom with Honduran troops and to sign and ratify an ICC Article 98 Agreement with the U.S. The meeting also underlined USG statements of encouragement and support for Maduro in the fight against narcotrafficking. Maduro, in fact, made clear during the subsequent joint press conference that the USG was a firm supporter of Honduras and the GOH's fight against narcotrafficking. Post expects President Maduro to make many of the same points he raised in his meeting with General Myers in his planned August 20 meeting with Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld. End Comment.

Pierce